

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O P 110908Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8643
INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3852

EXDIS

FOR NEA DRAPER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS LE SY
SUBJ: LEBANON: NATURE OF CHRISTIAN QUARTER WHICH WAS ATTACKED

REF: STATE 174116

1. SUMMARY: FIGHTING OVER LAST WEEK HAS BEEN ESSENTIALLY IN ASHRAFIYAH, AYN AR-RUMMANEH AND BORDERING AREAS. JEWISH, ARMENIAN, AND SYRIAC AREAS WERE NOT REPEAT NOT INVOLVED. THERE IS NO ASSYRIAN QUARTER AS SUCH. END SUMMARY.

2. AREAS HIT. ASHRAFIYAH AND ADJACENT AREAS, SUCH AS AYN AR-RUMMANAH (WHERE IT ALL STARTED ON JULY 1), BADARO, FURN ES CHEBBAK AND SAIFI ARE OVERWHELMINGLY MARONITE, BUT MANY MARONITES LIVE ELSEWHERE, IN AREAS OF COMPLETE QUIET, INCLUDING THE MOUNTAINS AND COASTAL AREA UP TO TRIPOLI AND EVEN WEST BEIRUT. ASHRAFIYAH WAS ATTACKED BECAUSE IT IS POLITICAL-MILITARY BASTION OF LEBANESE FRONT PARTIES.

3. JEWISH QUARTER. TRADITIONAL JEWISH QUARTER IN BEIRUT IS AREA OF WADI ABU JMIL OR BAB IDRIS (N5330-E3100),

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ROUGHLY MIDWAY BETWEEN HOTEL DISTRICT AND THE BOURG. AREA HAD PERHAPS 7,000 JEWS BEFORE CIVIL WAR IN 1975-76. A JEWISH REPRESENTATIVE TOLD EMBOFF IN EARLY 1977 THAT THERE WERE PERHAPS 1,000 PEOPLE LEFT. THE NUMBER MAY BE EVEN LESS TODAY. (PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS MADE SPECIFIC AND EFFECTIVE EFFORT TO NOT REPEAT NOT INVOLVE LEBANESE JEWS IN 1975-76 FIGHTING. MANY EMIGRATED DURING

WAR, BECAUSE OF GENERAL SITUATION AND PROXIMITY OF QUARTER TO FIGHTING AREA; NOT BECAUSE OF ANY INVOLVEMENT IN WAR.) THIS AREA IS OUTSIDE OF RECENT FIGHTING AND HAS NOT BEEN AFFECTED AT ALL.

4. ARMENIANS. PRINCIPAL ARMENIAN AREA IN BEIRUT IS BOURG HAMMOUD, EAST OF BEIRUT RIVER, AND HAS POPULATION OF SOME 130,000. THERE WAS NO FIGHTING IN THIS AREA LAST WEEK ALTHOUGH, AS IN WEST BEIRUT, THERE HAVE PROBABLY BEEN A FEW STRAY ROUNDS. FIRST SIGN OF ANY TROUBLE IN AREA WAS ON JULY 9, WHEN SMALL GROUP OF TASHNAG MILITIAMEN, PROBABLY DRUNK, GOT INTO COFFEESHOP BRAWL WITH GROUP OF SYRIAN SOLDIERS, ACCORDING TO DATT SOURCES. SECOND ARMENIAN QUARTER IS JUMMAZAH (ROUGHLY BETWEEN THE BOURG AND THE PORT) AND INCLUDES POPULATION OF SOME 10,000 ARMENIANS. IT WAS HIT HARD BY THE FIGHTING, BECAUSE OF ITS LOCATION (WHICH IS BETWEEN PHALANGE PARTY HEADQUARTERS NEAR THE BOURG AND THE LEBANESE FRONT "UNIFIED MILITARY COMMAND" HEADQUARTERS AT QARANTINA.) MOST PROSPEROUS ARMENIANS TEND TO LIVE IN SCATTERED PLACES IN WEST BEIRUT, AND NUMBER ABOUT 400 TO 500. ARMENIANS HAVE NOT BEEN TARGETED.

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5. SYRIACS (OR "SYRIAN CHRISTIANS"). THERE ARE TWO SYRIAC NEIGHBORHOODS IN BEIRUT: 1) NEAR HOTEL DIEU HOSPITAL AND MUSEUM AREA IN EAST BEIRUT, ADJACENT TO ASHRAFIYAH, AND 2) IN MASRAA AREA IN WEST BEIRUT. SYRIAC QUARTER NEAR HOTEL DIEU HAS BEEN HEAVILY HIT. SYRIAN SOURCES (INCLUDING ADF COMMANDER SAMI KHATIB)

TELL US THAT ADF POSITIONS, PARTICULARLY IN MUSEUM AREA, HAVE RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE HOSTILE FIRE FROM PHALANGISTS IN AREA AROUND HOTEL DIEU, WHICH HAS MIXED MARONITE AND SYRIAC POPULATION. (WE HAVE NO ESTIMATE OF PERCENTAGES.) MANY SYRIACS ARE AS HARD-LINE PRO-LEBANESE FRONT AS SOME MARONITES.

6. ASSYRIANS. (MANY LEBANESE CALL THEM "SYRIACS", CONFUSING THIS IRAQI-ORIGIN GROUP WITH THE SYRIAN-ORIGIN SYRIACS DESCRIBED ABOVE.) THERE IS NO ASSYRIAN QUARTER IN BEIRUT AS SUCH (BUT THERE ARE ASSYRIAN CONCENTRATIONS IN VILLAGES IN THE MOUNTAINS). THE ASSYRIANS FREQUENTLY LIVE IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE SYRIACS (SEE ABOVE).

7. COMMENT: JEWS ARE NOT INVOLVED; ARMENIANS IN BOURG HAMMOUD ARE ESSENTIALLY UNINVOLVED, BUT ARMENIANS IN DOWNTOWN
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AREA ARE; SYRIACS IN HOTEL DIEU AREA ARE INVOLVED, BUT NOT IN MASRAA AREA; ASSYRIANS HAVE NO QUARTER OF THEIR OWN. THIS ALL DEMONSTRATES THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE NOT ATTACKED AREAS ON BASIS OF THEIR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS WHATSOEVER. THE SYRIANS THEMSELVES CONTINUE TO INSIST THAT THEY ARE FIGHTING ARMED MILITIA ELEMENTS WHO RESIST THEIR AUTHORITY AS THE ARMED FORCE OF THE LEBANESE STATE, WITHOUT REGARD TO THE RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION. THE EVIDENCE ON THE GROUND COMPLETELY SUPPORTS THIS CLAIM.

8. CASUALTIES. WE NOTE SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE OF JULY 10, IN WHICH "QUESTION" REFERS TO AMERICAN LEBANESE LEAGUE CLAIM THAT SYRIAN ARMY HAS KILLED "60,000 LEBANESE MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN" AND WOUNDED ANOTHER 200,000. THIS CLAIM IS GROTESQUE: HIGHEST ESTIMATE HERE TO DATE COMES FROM PHALANGIST VOICE OF LEBANON RADIO, CLAIMING 1,200 KILLED. OFTEN-CITED ESTIMATE, WHICH WE ARE INCLINED TO SUPPORT, PUTS LEBANESE KILLED TO DATE AT 150-200, PLUS PERHAPS 500 WOUNDED (MOSTLY CIVILIANS). DURING ENTIRE 1975-76 CIVIL WAR, THERE WERE, ACCORDING TO BEST INFORMED SOURCES, TOTAL OF 40,000-50,000 KILLED, ON ALL REPEAT ALL SIDES. SYRIANS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH GREAT MAJORITY OF THEM.
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